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ABSTRACT

During the 1980s major changes occurred in the field of educational administration. Three antecedents for change were the restructuring of education administration by governments across the world as a function of the economic management of state, the general availability of powerful information technology to meet the processing and communication needs of practitioners, and the attention by researchers to epistemological concerns in the field of educational administration. The purpose of this paper is to evaluate the impact of restructuring, information technology, and the move to scientific realism in research, on the field of educational administration. Three cases are described: (1) the reform of education administration in New Zealand; (2) the desktop computer; and (3) the epistemological movement in Australia. Following this is a brief analysis of the cases which leads to a section detailing possibilities for progress in the 1990s. (Contains 41 references.) (RR)

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Three Possibilities for Progress in Educational Administration: Reform, Techno-Science Rationality, Research

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Abstract

During the 1980s major changes occurred in the field of educational administration. Three antecedents for change were, namely: the restructuring of education administration by Governments across the world as a function of the economic management of State; the general availability of powerful information technology to meet the processing and communication needs of practitioners; and, the attention by researchers to epistemological concerns in the field of educational administration.

The purpose of this paper is to evaluate the impact of restructuring, information technology, and the move to scientific realism in research, on the field of educational administration. Three cases, "the reform of education administration in New Zealand", "the desktop computer", and "the epistemological movement in Australia" are elaborated to develop possibilities for progress in the 1990s. The sub-text is a critique of the growth of knowledge in the field of educational administration.

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Introduction

During the 1980s major changes occurred in the field of educational administration and management. A multiplicity of factors constituted the contexts for change, not the least of which were interests exterior to practice. Political and economic concerns in particular hosted sweeping changes in the management of states across the world. With surprising similarity state and national governments chose to intervene in public sector administration to reform the structure of organisations and subsequently, to limit government interest in the provision of services. Therefore, governments chose to reposition the interest in education from that of a provider-of-sevices to that of a purchaser-of-services. Educational administration subsequently became politically engaged and, as noted by Beare (1989:2), "structural change has been a common feature in schools and school systems around the world in the 1980s, especially in western countries".

Structural change is one of the three cases in the 1980s to be reviewed. Needlessly, concurrent with the restructuring of states technological change advanced at an ever increasing rate during the 1980s. By the close of the decade high-powered desk-top computers with appropriate management programmes were affordable and generally available for educational administrators. Consequently, the speed, the status and the nature of management tasks had potential for change. Instant communications coupled with rapid information processing enlarged the domain of practice beyond institutional and geographical boundaries, and into the global village (Harman, 1980).

A third impetus for change in educational administration came from theory. The 1980s opened with reaction to the alleged "turmoil" in the field of organisation theory (Griffiths, 1979; Willower, 1980, 1981; Greenfield, 1980), and developed into an open concern about the "scientific" foundations on which administrators were educated (Griffiths, Stout, Forsyth, 1988). Epistemological matters were consequently brought to the fore. New pathways for knowledge were allegedly found in the coherence between the "partitioned" fields of knowledge in theory and practice (Walker, 1987; Evers, 1988; Macpherson, 1990, 1991a, 1992).

Three particular cases for change will now be reviewed to identify some essential features of change in the 1980s. An analysis of cases follows and an elaboration of implications for progress in the 1990s concludes the paper.

Case 1: Re-forming Education Administration

The reform of New Zealand Education administration was in keeping with similar moves by governments around the world to change structures in the management of state (Beare, 1989; Macpherson, 1991b; Thody, 1991). The major differences were to be the speed of change and the depth to which the reforms would reach. The restructuring was to effect all schools, support services, regional and national administrative structures. Educational practices and organisations of over 100 years standing were to be radically changed and new patterns implemented within 18 months. The reform therefore became known as the "earthquake model". Not surprisingly the

implementation process was characterised by chaotic disintegration of previously regulated contexts and unheard-of upheaval in management practices. However, two and three years on from the 1989 change-over, researchers have reported longer-term benefits for educational administrators (Mitchell, 1991; Cusack, 1991b; Ramsay, 1992; Wylie, 1992).

The devolution of powers was achieved by the retention of policy controls at the centre by agencies and by devolving responsibility for an institution's well-being as close as possible to the communities and members of the institution. Charters and contracts formalised the links between those responsible for making policy and those responsible for implementing education policy. An education Review Agency ensured public accountability through three-yearly reviews of all institutions. Consequently, after 1 October 1989 the administrative structures in New Zealand education were designed to give maximum choice at institution level for resource management, objectivity and simplicity for policy analysis at systems level, and trustworthy advice to the Minister of Education at the centre (Cusack, 1991b).

The essential features of the new administrative system were (Picot Report, 1988:41):

- simplicity;
- decision-making at appropriate levels;
- national objectives;
- co-ordinated decision-making;
- clear responsibilities and goals;
- control over resources;
- accountability; and,
- openness and responsiveness.

The results of reform in progression were:

- an initial acceptance of the need for change;
- chaos, confusion and criticism of the processes of reform;
- over-work and a harking back to former practices;
- good reports; and,
- measurable outcomes.

Case 2: Re-valuing Educational Administration

The second case concerns the revaluing of educational administration and management tasks by the advancement of technology. Technological advancements to some extent made the dreams of the education reformers possible. During the 1980s the growth of technological applications for use in educational administration was matched by their general availability and usefulness. Relevant progress came in two general areas, namely, communications and information processing.

To name some of the progress the following administrative tools come to mind: the facsimile, the desktop publisher, the laser printer, digitised video, interactive video, data displays, portable telephones, e-mail, data-bases, accounting spreadsheets, art, text, and character scanners, enhanced merging capacities, and CD-ROM applications. However, the availability of such resources did not necessarily mean their wide spread use. Gribbens (1986: 177), for example, noted that:

> Most educational administrators have yet to directly experience the effects of computerisation on their work routines, although indirectly effects have led to more constrained management

And Mackett et.al. (1988: 233) concluded that:

> In spite of the high level of attention and energy being devoted to educational computing, a clearly articulated leadership effort to shape computer policy and practice has not yet emerged.

The structural redesign of education administration in New Zealand imposed on school principals management practices and work loadings which were in keeping with informatic designs for organisations (Beardon, 1985; Beare, 1989; Wylie, 1992). This meant that school principals were to focus on "budgeting", "management", "administration" and "consultation" tasks (Wylie, 1989). Work load increases and decreases followed a similar pattern to that of the introduction of computerisation into work places (Beardon, 1985; Wylie, 1992).

Changes in the work place of the educational administrator were, however, more than structural. Technology provided ready reasons for doing and a new sense for rational legitimacy. Information technology saturated environments with high quality and up-to-date data from which decisions could be made. The immediacy of information was important and accuracy less so. Leadership demanded skills in the management and expenditure of information, and the steerage of policy on a "factual" basis. Subsequently, justification could regress to a new technological limit and hence, a new mind-set entered the administrators office, that of techno-science rationality (Lyotard, 1984; Peters, 1989).

The essential features of technological change were:

- more constrained management;
- alterations in the composition, number and deployment of personnel;
- re-skilling and de-skilling of personnel;
- organisation restructuring; and,
- information saturated environments.

The results of technological applications were:

- information rich work places;
- techno-science rationality for legitimation;
- knowledge as a commodity for exchange;
- a devaluing of non-quantified knowledges; and,
- goal orientated management.

Case 3: Re-searching Educational Administration

The third case concerns theory. Theory building has been with the field since its inception. However, the state of theory came under increasing criticism in the 1980s. Particular approaches to knowing educational administration were alleged to be untrustworthy under new conditions (Macpherson, 1992:8):

> The general upshot is that many research findings only make sense in terms of unique logics of justification and semantics. Knowledge claims have become hopelessly partitioned. What was once high hopes for a coherent and holistic theory of practice continue to fade into confusion.

Consequently, the empirical question, What do we know about educational administration and management ?, was paralleled by an equally important epistemological question, How do we know what we do ?

The underlying debate has been forcefully reviewed (Macpherson. 1990, 1991a, 1992) and by others else where (Griffiths, 1979, 1988; Willower, 1980, 1981; Bates, 1980, 1982, 1983; Evers, 1987,1988; Greenfield 1988, 1991). The purpose here is to briefly summarise the state of the debate.

Turmoil in the field of organisation theory at the beginning of the 1980s hosted a debate in educational administration theory regarding foundations. In particular doubt was expressed at the "scientific" ways of knowing educational administration. This was an on-going issue. At the close of the decade alternative approaches to researching educational administration were more common and new directions for theory were indicated by catch-all banners such as the "New Philosophy of Science", "Chaos Theory" and "Scientific Realism".

Overarching the debate was a shared concern to bring theory and practice closer together in an holistic and coherent framework for knowing educational administration.

The essential features of a general theory for educational administration, therefore, required (Macpherson, 1992:9-13):

- a theory of practices with a logical and semantic unity;
- a reconciliation of traditionally partitioned knowledge claims; and,

- a preoccupation with the long-term growth of holistic knowledge about educational administration.

The results of such an enterprise would be:

- coherence between empirical, subjective and normative data;
- the inclusion of qualitative data and methods;
- non-partitioned knowledge;
- recognition of the complexity of reality;
- no privileged foundations for knowledge;
- a touchstone between theories;
- rigour and flexibility;
- holistic tests of justification and coherence tests of evidence;
- a comprehensive, coherent and systematic theory of human epistemic practices; and,
- an openness to change.

Analysis of Cases

Agendas for the future of the practice and theory in educational administration are necessarily in the hands of many people. Evidence from the 1980s indicated that many of those people may be outside of the "education family". The long shadows cast by the intervention of governments into the traditionally regulated and non-political contexts of educational administration are here to stay. Government interest in the organisation, content and delivery of education will remain as long as the outcomes of education are linked to improved economic performance. The objects of change in the 1980s -- structures, career paths and professional expectations, are allegedly now flexible and responsive to change. Therefore, essential components of the past have a bearing on possibilities for progress in the 1990s. Such a list would include:

- the enhanced professional profile of educational administrators and managers;
- the integration of technological applications into professional practice;
- the de-partitioning of knowledge;
- political engagement; and,
- educational leadership in a global village.

The cases of change in the 1980s were characterised by an open set of "re-" words, such as: reform, restructuring, redefining, and revaluing. Such language sprang from an assumption that already established organisations and objects could be reshaped to design. For example, education reform started with historically defined education structures and practices, and these were to be restructured into new configurations. Technological revaluation started with industrial

work places and moved towards informatic designs. Finally, research had a firm foundation from which to proceed. Change in the 1980s was, therefore, concerned with the rearrangement of established objects into new divisions and configurations. Progress in the 1990s, however, might focus on a set of "ge-" words, such as gestalt -- to make the holistic jump from groups of established objects to possibilities for educational progress.

Possibilities for Progress in the 1990s

Essential changes in the field of educational administration have provided possibilities for progress in the 1990s. Political intervention into education administration in the 1980s wrought structural change and the possibility of an enhanced profession. Technology altered the basis for practice and had the potential to bring further change in the quality of decision-making by education administrators. Thirdly, an alleged closer fit of theory and practice opened possibilities for change in the ways of knowing educational administration. Together such changes indicated future directions in the field and substantial theories on which to face the challenges of the future.

The notion of progress necessarily inferred the measurement of one theory against another, that one may be preferred over the other on account of identifiable evidence. A "good" theory was, therefore, one which proved better than another. For example, if a theory falsified another by outrunning the epistemic content of the former by way of sequential and progressive corroboration between the theories, then it was considered better, and progress had been made (Lakatos, 1970). Growth in knowledge would need to be further substantiated by success at "real problem-solving" (Walker, 1987), and the convergence of empirical abstractions with "socio-temporal conditions in reality" (Ever, 1897). That is to say that an acceptable new theory T2, was one that lead to the discovery of novel facts and had the following characteristics:

- had excess empirical content over a former theory T1;
- included all the unrefutable content of T1; and,
- some of the excess content of T2 was corroborated.

For progress in theory building such knowledge claims would need to (Evers & Lakomski, 1991:63):

- contribute to the long term growth of knowledge about the holistic nature of educational administration;
- be conservative to encourage wise incremental elaborations, to respect past beliefs, and to limit the liabilities which go with accepting a new theoretical hypothesis;
- be modest to accept the least extravagant theory that "does the job";
- be simple so that entities are not multiplied beyond necessity;
- be general or comprehensive to enhance trustworthiness;

- be refutable so that the cost of retaining the theory in the face of imaginable events is acceptable; and,
- have coherence in consistency, fecunidity (or potency) and explanatory unity.

These claims reflected a movement to include a values base in the theory of educational administration. Theories underlying education reform and techno-science rationality have in general been exclusive rationalities and the consequential deficits have been left for redressing in the 1990s. Progress may be achieved in the field of education administration with a coherent and holistic theory of practice. Such a merging of theoretical structures and pragmatic complexities is a waiting future.

Summary

Education has traditionally provided a value rich environment in which successive generations have gained mobility into diverse and often personal pursuits. The repositioning of government interest in education during the 1980s changed the balance of competing theories about good education administration. A preference for economic and political theories underwrote a new wave of managerial activity based on measurable outcomes. The advancement of technological applications in educational administration introduced another exclusive rationality into the field -- that of techno-science. Deficits in such approaches for legitimating and knowing educational management practices are a challenge for educational administrators in the 1990s.

Recourse to the re-structuring, re-valuing and re-searching experiences of the 1980s provided a necessary touchstone from which to evaluate futures. The 1990s -- a future, on the other hand, required a ge-stalt shift to bring together previously partitioned knowledges about educational administration and, hence, to gather an holistic view of theory and practice. Arguably, then, such theory building activity is a possibility for progress in educational administration.

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